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RECENT THEOLOGICAL LITERATURE

SKINNER'S COMMENTARY ON GENESIS¹

Dr. Skinner has given us a great commentary, which will at once take its place not only as one of the best of this indispensable series, but also as the most complete and scientific commentary on Genesis in the English language. This can be said without any disparagement to the other commentaries of recent years on this book. Those of Delitzsch (2 vols.) and Dillmann (2 vols.) appeared in English translations twenty-one and thirteen years ago respectively, and since that time the progress of biblical science has been such that a fresh treatment of Genesis was needed. On the other hand, while Professor Bennett in the *Century Bible* and Professor Driver in the Westminster series have each written ideal commentaries on Genesis, they were limited by the more popular character of the series to which they belong. The scope of the *International Critical Commentary* has furnished a much larger opportunity than was allowed to either of those eminent scholars. This commentary is all that we should naturally be led to expect from the excellent character of Dr. Skinner's work already published, such as the two volumes on Isaiah (*Cambridge Bible*) and the commentary on Kings (*Century Bible*). The same painstaking scholarship, saneness of judgment, and fine spiritual insight which characterized these former productions are displayed in this larger work.

One of the outstanding facts which will impress the student and reader is the immense amount of labor represented in its production. Every legitimate question of introduction or interpretation is considered. The volume comprises lxxvii pages of introductory material and 540 of commentary proper, followed by 10 pages of indexes. Besides these, xx pages more are occupied with an admirable preface and a list of abbreviations employed. This might, at first thought, seem sufficient to include an ample treatment of all the problems legitimately connected with the book in good-sized type, but as Genesis presents so many and such difficult questions, it has been found necessary by the author, in order to cover all the ground adequately, to employ small

¹ *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Genesis (International Critical Commentary)*. By Rev. John Skinner, D.D., Principal and Professor of Old Testament Language and Literature, Westminster College, Cambridge. New York: Scribner, 1910. lxxvii+551 pages. \$3.

type to a large extent. This is one of the undesirable features of the book which the author clearly recognizes and frankly regrets (p. ix, Preface).

Another outstanding feature of the book is the judiciousness displayed in the treatment of all the various questions which come within the scope of introduction, both in the conclusions adopted and the amount of space devoted to them. As an illustration one may note how Dr. Skinner disposes of a question, which formerly was such a burning issue, viz., the relation of the opening chapters of Genesis to the results of science. It may surprise some to find that he has "not found it necessary to occupy much space" with this problem (p. viii, Preface; cf. p. 5). But surely this is a judicious decision and a mark of progress, as even Dr. Driver felt called upon to discuss this topic at length, though it is no longer really a living issue.² It is a matter of congratulation that we have reached this position, when we recall the various painstaking but painful harmonistic attempts of the past, or the space occupied in giving the grounds why these chapters should not be considered as scientific statements. Let us hope that it is now settled that Genesis was never designed as an authoritative pronouncement on scientific facts.

Among the topics of introduction, that of the composite authorship of the book naturally occupies a leading place. The author's discussion of this part of the subject covers about half of the introductory section (pp. xxxiv-lxvii), under such divisions as: "The sources of Genesis"; "the collective authorship of J and E—their relation to literary prophecy"; "date and place of origin—Redaction of JE"; "the Priestly code and the final redaction." One will find here an admirable summary of the main arguments for the critical position. With most recent scholars Dr. Skinner takes the view that the symbols J and E represent not two individual writers "but two *schools*, i.e., two series of narrators, animated by common conceptions, following a common literary method, and transmitting a common form of the tradition from one generation to another" (p. xlv). In his brief comparison between the view commonly accepted that J and E were the production of *literary* schools to whose efforts the different variations within each document are to be attributed, and the view of Gunkel that they were "first of all guilds of oral narrators, whose stories gradually took written shape within their respective circles, and were ultimately put together in the collections as we now have them," our author is guarded though favoring the latter theory (p. xlvi).

² Cf. Driver's *Genesis*, xxxvii-xlii; lxi-iii; 19-26.

Dr. Skinner takes issue with the common designation of J and E "as the *prophetic* narrative of the Pentateuch" (Hexateuch), especially as used by writers who claim that these sources were influenced by the prophets from the time of Amos onward. Nor is he inclined to recognize the great prophetic movement of the ninth century (i.e., Elijah and Elisha) as affecting these sources, since he maintains that the impulses "inherent in the religion from its foundation by Moses" are sufficient to account for their religious tone (p. li). This is perhaps not a question of great moment, but it seems to us that the usual name employed, "prophetic," is as fitting as any. Moses is certainly recognized by E as a prophet (Num. 18:1-13),³ as well as by later writers (e.g., Deut. 18:18; Hos. 12:13). If, then, the religious teaching of JE can be traced back to impulses originating with Moses, *the prophet*, technically there can be no objection to the application of the term prophetic to them. But besides this, while the teaching of E is not on the same lofty moral and spiritual plane as that of the great prophets of the eighth century and following, it anticipates in many ways their lofty standpoint.⁴

In reference to P, Dr. Skinner controverts the view of Dr. Orr that the historical material of P is to be considered as simply supplementary, and not a continuous narrative, "which is a *source* as well as the framework of Genesis" (p. lvii). His treatment here is especially masterly and convincing. Two steps in his discussion may be mentioned, viz., the printing in full of the P material relating to Abraham (p. lviii), and the showing of the differences in representation compared with the older narratives whenever P is given with any fulness (p. lix).

The author is especially interesting and illuminating in his discussion of the narratives embodied in Genesis (pp. i-xxxii). Those addicted to a literalism which would shatter the poetic spirit of these narratives (legends, if you will) need to read with open mind pages iv ff. which abound in statements which deserve citation if space permitted. The following must suffice:

One of the strangest theological prepossessions is that which identifies revealed truth with matter-of-fact accuracy either in science or in history. Legend is after all a species of poetry, and it is hard to see why a revelation

³ It is to be noted, however, that this section is regarded by many critics as belonging to the later stratum of E (E²).

⁴ Cf., for example, President W. R. Harper's estimate of E: "In many points it is on a level with Amos and Hosea."—*International Critical Commentary* on Amos and Hosea, p. lxxxiv.

which has freely availed itself of so many other kinds of poetry—fable, allegory, parable—should disdain that form of it which is the most influential of all in the life of a primitive people. As a vehicle of religious ideas, poetic narrative possesses obvious advantages over literal history; and the spirit of religion, deeply implanted in the heart of a people, will so permeate and fashion its legendary lore as to make it a plastic expression of the imperishable truths which have come to it through its experience of God [p. v.]

Attention is called by the author to the significant fact of the spiritual influence of the Hebrew religion which in chaps. i–xi has “transformed and purified the crude speculations of pagan theology, and adapted them to the ideas of an ethical and monotheistic faith” (p. ix).

The view that the historical background of the patriarchal period, as revealed by archaeological research, proves the historical character of the narratives relating to this period is carefully examined and weighed, with the conclusion that “the case for the historicity of the tradition, based on correspondences with contemporary evidences from the period in question, appears to us to be greatly overstated” (p. xvii).

The ethnographical theories in their various forms are also considered with a verdict against them: “Each system has some plausible and attractive features; but each, to avoid absurdity, has to exercise a judicious restraint on the consistent extension of its principles” (p. xxi).

As regards the patriarchs as individuals he recognizes that all that the data will admit is not “more than a *substantial nucleus* of historic fact” (p. xxiii). At the same time his opinion is that the view that such names as Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph were historic individuals is more probable than any other view advanced, though Abraham has much stronger claims as a historical character than the others (pp. xxv ff.; cf. pp. 356 f.). While agreeing in the main with the author's contention at this point we cannot but question whether he has done full justice to the view of Cornill and others (*viz.*, of a combination both of narratives of individuals [probably idealized in many features] together with tribal traditions which in their transmission became individualized), inasmuch as he apparently has adopted some of their conclusions.

Wiener's arguments against the critical view based on the unreliability of the Massoretic text in reference to the occurrence of the divine names are dealt with briefly but summarily (pp. xxxv f.). Dr. Skinner ably defends the substantial accuracy of the Hebrew text and concludes with this statement: “It is idle to speculate on what would have happened if Astruc and his successors had been compelled to operate with

the Greek text instead of the Hebrew; but it is a rational surmise that in that case criticism would still have arrived, by a more laborious route, at very much the positions it occupies today" (p. xxxvii). In view of the importance attached to Wiener's arguments in conservative quarters it would seem that this section ought to have been printed in larger type. The author's discussion deserves a more prominent setting. The same may be said of the fine piece of dialectics in which Dr. Orr's arraignment of the critical view is incisively examined (pp. xlf.). It is unfortunate, to say the least, that this has been relegated to the aggravating, fine type. Eerdmans' view of the polytheistic background behind the Genesis traditions is more briefly treated (pp. xlii f.). Dr. Skinner concludes with this specimen of irony: "What with Winckler and Jeremias, and Cheyne, and now Eerdmans, O.T. scholars have a good many new eras dawning on them just now. Whether any of them will shine unto the perfect day, time will show."

As regards Dr. Skinner's treatment of the Genesis narratives in the section of the book especially devoted to their exposition, space does not permit, nor is it needful to do more than call attention to a few illustrations of his method or conclusions. Of the 540 pages included in this division of the book, 239 are occupied with chaps. i-xi, which indicates the number and difficulty of the problems connected with this part of the book. The remainder is apportioned as follows: to Abraham (chaps. xii-xxv:18), pp. 240-354; to Jacob (chaps. xxv:19-xxxvi), pp. 355-437; and to Joseph and his brethren (chaps. xxxvii-l), pp. 438-540. The interpretation is marked with great care and independence of judgment, even though it is pretty thoroughly *Gunkled*. This is simply a statement of fact, not a criticism. The spiritual meaning is everywhere recognized when present and clearly expressed. This may be illustrated in the following passages taken almost at random. The "religious significance" of Gen. 1:1-2:3 "lies in the fact that in it the monotheistic principle of the O.T. has obtained classical expression" (p. 6). It is not an account of "*creatic de nihilo*," "but a long advance toward the full theological doctrine" (pp. 7, 13 f., 15). Chap. iii "in depth of moral and religious insight" . . . "is unsurpassed in the O.T. We have but to think of its delicate handling of the question of sex, its profound psychology of temptation and conscience, and its serious view of sin, in order to realize the educative influence of revealed religion in the life of ancient Israel" (p. 52). Chap. xxiv sets forth a "profoundly religious conception of Yahwe's providence as an unseen power, overruling events in answer to prayer" (p. 340). The Joseph

stories illustrate the thought "of an overruling, yet immanent, divine Providence, realizing its purpose through the complex interaction of human motives, working out a result which no single actor contemplated" (p. 440).

On the other hand there is an honest dealing with the narratives as they are without reading into them spiritual meaning, which the author does not believe they legitimately contain. Dr. Skinner's position in this regard may be seen in the following instances. Of 3:15 he states, "it is doubtful if, from the standpoint of strict historical exegesis, the passage can be regarded as in any sense a *Protevangelium*" (p. 81). The offering of Isaac (chap. xxii) he thinks originally belonged to "the class of aetiological legends which everywhere weave themselves round peculiarities of ritual whose real origin has been forgotten or obscured" (p. 332). "No more boldly anthropomorphic narrative is found in Genesis" than that of Jacob wrestling with the Angel (32:22-32); "and unless we shut our eyes to some of its salient features, we must resign the attempt to translate it wholly into terms of religious experience. We have to do with a legend, originating at a low level of religion, in process of accommodation to the purer ideas of revealed religion" (p. 411).

On the interpretation of such passages as these, many who class themselves in the modern school will doubtless disagree with his views, preferring to follow more cautious and conservative conclusions, such as are given by Doctors Bennett and Driver. But whether one agrees or differs from Dr. Skinner on these or other points of interpretation, there can be no question that his conclusions are presented only after a careful examination of different claimant views, and with a marked freedom from the dogmatic spirit. Students of the Old Testament have been placed under a debt of deep and lasting obligation to Dr. Skinner, which can be fully appreciated only by a careful examination of the book itself.

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THE SAMARITAN LITURGY

Mr. Cowley has at last given the learned world the most important desideratum in Samaritan literature—a properly edited text of that mass of hymns and midrashic material current in the Samaritan Com-